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ABSTRACT

This paper consists of some preliminary tips for teachers on how to hold portfolio conferences followed by 25 specific suggestions presented in the right hand column of a chart; the left-hand column contains related comments under the heading of "General Organizational Structure." A variety of portfolio conferences can be conducted in language arts classrooms. These include impromptu conferences when students need to discuss a reading or writing task, group conferences when students want to meet to collaborate on a project, and peer conferences that facilitate the editing process. Especially important are planned and scheduled individual conferences with each student in the classroom--these should be at least 15 minutes long and should be held a mininum of four times each year. Many activities in an integrated reading/writing program can provide conferencing time--for example, students who need extra time to organize and review their portfolios may work while the teacher confers with those who finish the process more quickly; during student authoring circles teachers could conduct group portfolio conferences; or teachers could confer with individual students while others edit, revise, do library research, or make self-reflective entries in their journals. If a school provides an activity period or a scheduled study hall, a teacher may schedule portfolio conferences outside of class time. Teachers can attempt to work portfolio conferences into regular instructional time--two suggestions are to establish a portfolio station where students can meet with the teacher or establish peer-tutoring sessions. Posting a schedule for students to sign-up for conference times, and developing learning contracts that require students to make appointments with the teacher are other options teachers may find useful. (SAM)

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Managing the Integrated Language Arts Classroom: Twenty-Five Suggestions for Finding Time for Portfolio Conferences

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Types of Conferences

There are all types of portfolio conferences that should be conducted in language arts classrooms. These include impromptu conferences when students have need to discuss some writing or reading selection with the teachers, group conferences when students want to meet together to share some project with one another as well as peer conferences.

Individual Conferences Must be Planned and Scheduled

There is, however, a need to have *planned and scheduled individual conferences with each student in your classroom.* There should be a minimum of four of these each year. Each individual conference will take about fifteen minutes. Some will be longer and some will be shorter. This means that you are going to spend a total of about one hour of scheduled individual conferencing time with each student over the course of the entire year. If you have twenty-five students in your class, this means you have to plan for a total of twenty-five hours of conference time. With all of the other demands on your time and energy, this will not be an easy task. However, the benefits of individual conferences are worth the time and effort.

Your Program Will Determine the Best Way to Find the Time for Conferences

It would be foolish to suggest specific ways to find the time for conferences in your classroom. That depends on many things including your teaching style, the help you may have available in the form of parents or teacher aides and the willingness of other teachers to team teach when conference time comes around.

Portfolio Conferences Fit More Naturally in Integrated Reading/Writing Programs

Portfolio conferences are much easier to plan and schedule in a classroom where authoring circles, reading/writing projects, and individual reading assignments are typical daily instructional activities. In this type of classroom, portfolio conferences become a natural part of the ongoing activities.

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Finding time is Difficult

Finding time for portfolio conferences is difficult, but the value of portfolio conferences far outweighs the difficulty you will have in finding the time to meet individually with your students. Depending on the way you organize your classroom and plan instruction, you may be able to use some of the following suggestions to find time to confer with your students.

These suggestions are not fully developed here. For examples, learning contracts, sustained silent reading, authoring circles, and portfolio organizing sessions are all ideas that are included below. If you decide to try any of those ideas you will need to search out other references about those activities if they are not familiar to you.

General Organization Structure	**Specific Suggestions**
Getting someone to work with the remainder of the students while you conference with individual students is usually the most convenient solution. If you do have assistance available, you should not turn the portfolio conferencing over to the person who helps you. Conferences are so important to you as a teacher that your personal time with each student must be protected.	**1.** Teacher aides are available in some schools and they provide a useful resource. **2.** Parents are often willing to serve as teacher helpers who may talk with the students about their vocation or avocation, read to the students, or engage in some other appropriate activity. **3.** Some schools provide opportunities for older students (often high school students) to serve as teacher aides. If activities are carefully planned, these students can work with the class while you conduct conferences. **4.** Team teaching activities provide ideal opportunities. You and a fellow teacher can plan some large group activities during which the two of can take turns working with the total group of students while one of you conducts individual student conferences.
Many activities in an integrated reading/writing program provide conferencing time.	**5.** When students are organizing and reviewing their portfolios to get ready to conference with the teacher, several portfolio conferences can be held with those who finish their organizing more quickly. **6.** During student led authoring circles, you could conduct several portfolio conferences with students. **7.** The time that students are engaged in reading/writing activities such as revising and editing papers for publication is another good portfolio conference time.

	8. Library visiting periods are usually a key part of an integrated language arts program and while students are engaged in library research, you can meet with individual students. **9.** Many teachers provide time each day for students to write in their journals. You may find the time to conduct one or two conferences during this journal writing time. **10.** It is very useful to have students write their thoughts about their journals before they conference with you. (Kindergarten students can draw a picture about their journals.) During this self-reflection time, you can conduct several conferences.
Outside of class time can be used if you can get the schedules, both yours and the students, to coincide.	**11.** Some school systems provide short periods either before or after school for teachers to meet with individual students, these times can be used for portfolio conferences. **12.** If students have scheduled study periods or other flexible time in their schedules, you can plan to meet with them during those times.
You can also attempt to work the portfolio conferences into your regular instructional time without looking for "extra time".	**13.** Some teachers utilize individual learning stations as a regular part of instruction. One of these can be developed as portfolio station where the students come to meet with you while other students are engaged with other learning activities. **14.** Portfolio conferences are often natural ongoing activities in reading/writing classrooms and they need not be scheduled. Students in such classes seek out teachers to discuss the latest story or book they have read or share a written piece with a teacher. However, it is important not to let the conferences happen by chance. You have to make sure that they do happen. **15.** Peer-tutoring can be organized around activities such as buddy reading or shared reading, conferencing about written pieces, or developing special projects. During these peer-tutoring times, portfolio conferences can be your peer-tutoring activity.

	16. Sustained silent reading is a time when all students (and the teacher) are to be reading silently. However, given the importance of conferences to the support of reading, you may want to use that time to schedule portfolio conferences. **17.** Many teachers plan a variety of class activities when students work independently or in small groups. These include such things as doing research for a project, preparing art materials for a story or poem and self-selection of a reading or writing activity. During these independent class activities, you can plan to conduct several portfolio conferences.
Giving students the responsibility to find the time to meet with you works well in some classes. In using these suggestions you will not be solving the time problem, but you can get the students to share the responsibility for finding the time.	**18.** Learning contracts can be developed where one aspect of the contract is that a student must schedule an appointment (e.g., sometime in the next week) to discuss his or her reading/writing portfolio with you. **19.** Post a schedule and tell students that they must sign-up for portfolio conference time during the scheduled times. These times could include class periods where you have scheduled large group activities that you don't have to monitor—or before or after school.
If you have tried some of the ideas above, and you are still struggling to find the time for portfolio conferences, here are some suggestions that can help you get started when all else seems not to work.	**20.** Start out with small group conferences. You may have organized reading or writing groups in your class. Use these groups to conduct small group conferences giving each student an opportunity to discuss his or her portfolio. Small group conferences are not nearly as effective as individual conferences, but they are a way to get started. **21.** You can have a kind of conference without even meeting with your students. Have each student write notes about his or her portfolio and then you can collect the portfolios and after reviewing the contents of the portfolio, you can write a response to what the student has written. **22.** Peer conferences are a good idea after you have conducted many individual teacher/student conferences. Peer conferences are of limited value if the students have

	not experienced in-depth discussions with the teacher about reading/writing ideas. If, however, you can demonstrate an excellent conference with one or two students while the rest of the class listens in, you may be able to start out with peer conferences. **23**. Have students take their portfolios to a learning center (could be a table in the back of the room) equipped with a tape recorder. Have the student review the contents of the portfolio and tell you (through a taped message) about all of the things in the portfolio. You can listen to the recording and leave a recorded response to the student's message. **24.** Plan a two-stage approach to conferences. Have the students do peer-conferences before (or after) they conference with you. If they are held before, they give the students an opportunity to get their ideas together before meeting with you. If they are held after your conference, they give the student an opportunity to expand on ideas you have started by talking with another student. During the peer-conferences in this two-stage conference time, you can conference with individual students. **25.** This last idea is left blank. The blank emphasizes that classrooms are organized differently and teaching styles differ. There are many opportunities for portfolio conferences in your class. Add them to this blank space.